

APPENDIX 2

4 October 2006

Directors of Housing

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

Dear Director,

“Getting connected”: Guidelines for operating reconnections policies for rough sleepers - Outline framework

I wrote originally on 10 August 2005 following concern that some authorities were denying access to services to some vulnerable people, particularly rough sleepers, who do not have a connection to the area. The Department agreed to produce best practice on reconnection to ensure that it happens in a planned and informed manner and provides a basic safety net to protect vulnerable rough sleepers where reconnection will not be appropriate.

Therefore, I have pleasure in enclosing “Getting Connected”. The guidelines have been drawn up with key rough sleeping local authorities and the voluntary sector. The guidance is intended to provide an outline framework for local authorities and their partners to develop reconnections policies as part of their rough sleeping strategy. It identifies the type of issues that might be covered by individual reconnection protocols by authorities and their partners. I should be grateful if you would circulate this document as necessary.

Reconnection should be used by authorities as part of their overall strategy in tackling rough sleeping and ensuring that numbers on the street are as low as possible. It is an effective way to meet and sustain both the national and local rough sleeping target. Reconnection involves assisting rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return either to their home area or an area where they have some connection, such as accommodation, family or support. Reconnections policies should not be applied where a local housing authority has accepted a duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act (although local connections provisions under the homelessness legislation may be relevant).

We have coordinated the development of the reconnection policy with the SP grant conditions on local connection. The Supporting People grant conditions for 2006/07 do not permit authorities to impose local connection conditions to deny people access to short term SP services. However, the grant condition is expressed as being without prejudice to any reconnections policy the recipient authority has in place. This is in order to ensure that SP policy does not cut across reconnections

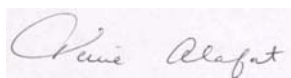
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policy, and means that where a rough sleeper presents themselves to the authority, the authority may consider whether they have a connection to the area and decide whether to support them through the reconnections policy or whether to support them through SP. Where the decision is taken not to support them through reconnection, no account may be taken of a lack of local connection in deciding whether support through SP should be made available.

If you require any further information on the guidelines I should be grateful if you would contact laura.cane@communities.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Terrie Alafat", on a light-colored rectangular background.

Terrie Alafat

"GETTING CONNECTED"

Guidelines for operating reconnections policies for rough sleepers - Outline framework

1. WHY HAVE RECONNECTIONS GUIDELINES?

- 1.1. This guidance is intended to provide an outline framework for local authorities and their partners to develop reconnections policies as part of their rough sleeping strategy. It covers the type of issues that might be covered in individual reconnection protocols by authorities and their partners. The guidelines are issued by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) following consultation with a group including local authorities and voluntary sector agencies. Those involved in developing this document are listed at annex A.
- 1.2 Experience from authorities across the country has demonstrated that having a robust local policy which has the agreement of all parties and which is operated as part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle rough sleeping will result in falling numbers on the streets.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The purpose of reconnection is to allow rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection. Used in isolation, reconnections will not be sufficient to tackle rough sleeping. However, when developed as part of an authority's overall approach to tackling rough sleeping and single homelessness it can be an extremely effective way to meet and sustain both the local and national target.
- 2.2 In letters sent to directors of Housing and SP Commissioning Bodies on 10th August 2005 DCLG (formerly ODPM) expressed concerns that some policies adopted by authorities and their partner agencies could deny vulnerable people who do not have a connection to the area access to hostels/shelters and support services and lead to potential increases in rough sleeping.
- 2.3 When considering developing a reconnections protocol as part of a local response to rough sleeping, authorities should bear in mind that the government's target to reduce rough sleeping is a national one.
- 2.4 A subsequent meeting with the LA Rough Sleeping Forum recommended the development of an outline framework for a reconnections protocol to assist local authorities in the development of best practice in this area.
- 2.5 It will not be appropriate to apply reconnections policies to every rough sleeper or single homeless person with out-of-area connections. In particular, where a local housing authority has accepted a duty to a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, reconnections policies

should not be applied (although local connections provisions under the homelessness legislation may be relevant).

3 Principles and outcomes

3.1 The main **principles** of a reconnection policy are that it should be:

- Part of an authority's cross-authority and inter-borough work to tackle and prevent homelessness generally.
- Offered as part of a locally agreed, client - centred assertive resettlement process for rough sleepers and single people.
- Have consensus at the local level with key (and where appropriate, regional or national) stakeholders, to ensure a robust and reciprocally agreed referral mechanism to where people have formal or informal support networks.

3.2 **Outcomes** for a local policy should include:

- A reduction in the number of people rough sleeping in the area.
- Ensuring that clients referred to other areas have accommodation (with support and access to services if appropriate) available when they arrive to prevent rough sleeping in those areas.
- A focus on vulnerable people for whom reconnection is either unavailable or inappropriate.
- Identifying and where possible, tackling gaps in provision

3.3 Supportive networks, both formal and informal, have been found to increase opportunities for people to move away from the streets to a more settled lifestyle. Reconnection works best on a tiered approach which identifies those people, both rough sleepers, hostel residents and day centre users, for whom a return to another area is appropriate. This approach will enable agencies to focus on the most vulnerable rough sleepers for whom reconnection is either inappropriate or not possible, and who may not be accessing services.

3.4 Authorities with services that offer county, sub-regional or regional resources for rough sleepers should consider the development of cross-authority or reciprocal arrangements and support in order to maximise resources. Such arrangements often work well in terms of placements in specialist homeless provision and with accessing settled accommodation. Cross authority working of this nature has enabled significant numbers of rough sleepers to move from the streets to a more settled and supported environment.

4 Designing your protocol

- 4.1 The processes involved in agreeing a local reconnections policy will vary between authorities. Elements to consider will include what street based and building based services are in place, and the level of engagement by other agencies such as the police, DATs, CMHTs and PCTs etc.
- 4.2 Best practice has shown that the process should be in two phases, intelligence gathering and developing the protocol itself. For example, before developing their protocol, local authorities will need to consider
 - Likely numbers involved
 - Where rough sleepers are migrating from
- 4.3 Key actions in intelligence gathering on numbers and where people have come from must include
 - audits/hot-spot counts/information from police and other relevant agencies
 - analysis of people living in hostels and night shelters
 - analysis of people using day centres, health facilities etc.
 - Identification of any travel patterns amongst both groups, for example sub-regional, county wide, between major conurbations or from prisons.
- 4.4 Development of the local protocol might be undertaken through established stakeholder groups such as Supporting People Core Strategy Groups or homelessness strategy groups. This has the advantage of encouraging links to all relevant partners such as SP teams, social services departments, RSLs, day centres, night shelters, hostels, rough sleeper services, the police, health agencies, alcohol & drug agencies, DATs, prisons and voluntary and faith groups.
- 4.5 Local authorities should identify other key local authorities with whom they have regular contact when developing their own reconnection protocols.
- 4.6 In many circumstances boroughs will not have regular contact with each other. Therefore, an approach should be made during office hours to the receiving local authority to determine the local policy. It is for each local authority to agree local arrangements for both making and receiving a referral.
- 4.7 The protocol should clearly outline the actions to be taken to establish if reconnection is appropriate, and how it should be affected. Staff should :
 - carry out an assessment of the individual's housing and support needs
 - identify if it is safe for the person to return to another area
 - obtain consent from the client
 - notify the receiving authority/housing provider to ensure that accommodation and/or other support services are available for the client in the receiving authority
 - agree arrangements to facilitate the transfer

- arrange and fund travel and any associated costs
 - where possible, accompany the person to the train/bus station so they can make their journey to the receiving authority
 - advise the receiving authority that the client is en route
 - follow-up by checking the client arrived safely
- 4.8 Authorities will need to budget for the setting up and running of reconnection services, but in practice these are proving not to be significant. The main costs are for travel warrants with the reconnections work being done by existing services such as outreach services or day centres.
- 4.9 Authorities must have clear and transparent eligibility criteria that ensure that vulnerable people can access services, either locally or in their home area.
- 4.10 There will be some people for whom reconnection is inappropriate and would not enable them to move off the streets. This could include people with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) preventing them from returning to specific areas, people who will be at risk if they return or those with no meaningful connection to any area. The policy must also identify and agree the outcomes for clients who refuse either to engage with the reconnection process or who refuse to accept a referral. In these instances services should be offered locally as part of an authority's strategy to tackle rough sleeping
- 4.11 All agencies must be made aware of the eligibility criteria so that there is a consistent approach to clients. Criteria should be non-discriminatory and take account of equality issues.
- 4.12 Local authorities should ensure that the protocol receives publicity locally, both at strategic and operational levels. Its implementation should form part of any communications strategy developed as part of homeless prevention options. This is particularly important when the protocol has been developed on a regional or sub-regional basis.
- 4.13 Effective monitoring will provide authorities and agencies with information in the following key areas;
- Patterns of rough sleeping locally
 - Positive outcomes for people for whom reconnection was effective
 - Outcomes for people for who reconnection was inappropriate
 - Numbers of rough sleepers returning after reconnection
 - Numbers of people refusing to engage with the process
 - Costs of the policy

5 SUMMARY

- The purpose of reconnection is to allow rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection.
- Reconnection can only work as part of an overall approach to tackling and preventing rough sleeping and must have agreement from local agencies to be effective.
- Reconnection will not be appropriate for some rough sleepers, for instance, those who are too vulnerable to return anywhere and those who do not have a connection to any particular area.

DCLG
October 2006

Below is the official description of what short term Supporting People services are:

Short term services mean a service which-

- a) aims to bring about independent living within two years (disregarding practical delays in securing move-on accommodation) following resolution of a specific need or needs which the supported living arrangement aims to remedy, or following completion of a time-limited programme of support of under two years intended duration; or
- b) aims to increase the capacity for independent living (even if fully independent living may not be likely) through a package of time-limited housing related support, which package has an intended duration of less than two years,

but shall exclude,

- i) any service provided by a Home Improvement Agency,
- ii) any service provided through a Handyperson scheme, and
- iii) any service whose aim is the maintenance of a limited degree of independent living which is not expected to increase.